



CHAIRMAN'S MEMORANDUM

NO. 2-2013 February 4, 2013

TO: SHERIFFS, CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICERS, COMMISSIONERS OF CORRECTION,
NEW YORK CITY WARDENS

RE: Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) Initiative

The purpose of the Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) initiative is to prevent homelessness among justice-involved veterans. Justice-involved veterans are veterans who have crisis encounters with law enforcement in the community, are jailed for relatively brief periods of time for offenses that do not result in prison time, and/or are adjudicated or monitored by either local criminal courts or specialty treatment courts, such as drug and mental health courts, usually for extended periods of time. VJO Specialists reach into the criminal justice system to ensure that eligible justice-involved veterans have timely access to Veterans Health Administration (VHA) mental health and substance abuse services when clinically indicated, and other VA services and benefits as appropriate.

A large number of veterans have contact with the criminal justice system, are eligible for VA services, and have significant risk factors and unmet clinical needs.

The most recent United States (U.S.) Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) Survey of inmates in local jails (2002) data indicates that 9.3 percent of people incarcerated in jails are veterans. High levels of untreated psychological trauma are found in correctional populations, including among incarcerated veterans. BJS reported in 2006 that 60 percent of all U.S. jail inmates had a mental health problem. As of 2005, only one in six jail inmates with a mental health diagnosis had received mental health treatment since incarceration. The 2002 BJS Jail Survey also found that 65 percent had screened positive for either an alcohol or drug dependency problem. Twenty-nine percent had been diagnosed with at least one of five psychiatric disorders (depressive, bipolar, psychotic, PTSD, or anxiety disorder). One in five (18 percent) veterans was homeless in the year prior to the current incarceration.

Treatment-focused court programs, including veteran-specific dockets, are increasingly prevalent.

A growing number of communities have established treatment courts, including Veterans, Drug and Mental Health Courts; these courts address the issues of defendants with specific needs or circumstances not adequately handled in the traditional court system. Veterans' Courts are the latest result of the treatment

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court movement; they aim to connect veteran defendants with needed mental health, substance abuse, and other services in a veteran-focused environment designed to provide support and encourage adherence to treatment.

VA medical centers recognize the value of partnerships with local justice-system and community treatment partners. In New York, Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists are based in the state's VA medical centers.

The Commission urges all sheriffs and jail administrators to consider collaborating with the Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists in assisting veterans in your facility to possibly avoid future re-incarceration of those who served this country.

If your facility is interested in working with the Department of Veteran Affairs, please find below a listing of Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists and their assigned VA medical centers. If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact the Commission.

Albany, Albany VA Medical Center: Samuel S. Stratton, Courtney Slade

Bath, Bath VA Medical Center, Ann Smith-Howles

Bronx, James J. Peters VA Medical Center (Bronx, NY), Siobhan Morris

Buffalo, VA Western New York Healthcare System at Buffalo, John Lahood

Canandaigua, Canandaigua VA medical Center, Vincent Schillaci

Montrose, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Campus of the VA Hudson Valley Health Care System (Montrose), Jamila Miah

New York, Manhattan Campus of the VA NY Harbor Healthcare System, Denise Lukowski

Northport, Northport VA Medical Center, Eric Bruno

Syracuse, Syracuse VA Medical Center, Kynna Murphy



Thomas A. Beilein, Chairman